

Secrets by TheMikeWheelers (jasongracefully)

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Summary:

"I just wish after all this time you finally learned to tell me things."

Secrets

Author's Note:

Me at 2am: I should write some angst

Me at 4am: Why am I like this?

He visited the next morning. El had refused to tell Hopper what had happened the night before, but when she heard the desperate knock on the door she instructed her father not to let him see her. She raced back to her bedroom, new tears forming in her eyes.

She sat on her bed, staring at herself in the mirror across the room. She figured after last night she must have been completely cried out, but here she was, in the same situation as before.

Muffled talking came from down the hall. A war started inside El's mind, one side screaming to listen in and the other begging to block it out.

Breath in, breath out, she thought, something he had taught her so long ago to help with nightmares. She didn't think she would end up using it on a real-life nightmare.

"Jus- Just tell her I'm sorry," Mike's voice rang down the hallway into her room, too clear for her to ignore.

One side of her mind had won, she blocked out whatever he said next or whatever Hopper's response was. She didn't want to know what they were saying.

Just tell her I'm sorry, it began to repeat in her mind.

Don't say that like it changed what you said last night, the anger was coming back. The memories of the screaming and the fighting until she finally just said, "Don't waste your time on me anymore then. I'm a lost cause," were all returning.

The tears in her eyes were attempting to break free, so El tried to focus on Mike's voice when he said that. Did he sound upset? Was he

still angry? Was his voice breaking like he was going to cry? El tried to remember what it was, but she couldn't determine if she was just imagining something or not. All she was sure of was those clear words that she wished would make her feel better, but if anything did the opposite.

As much as she tried to fight it, the memories of last night were echoing inside her.

~

He had slammed the basement door, the banging sound still caused her heart to jump just at the memory.

"How could you not tell me?!"

El began to shrink up, closing off, "I didn't want you to worry."

"You didn't want me to worry?! You could be dead right now but at least I didn't worry!" His voice was cold. El couldn't talk, she felt herself going back to her twelve year old self, she couldn't bring herself to say anything, fear shutting her away.

"I- I-"

"You what?! What do you have to say? Friends don't lie El, I thought that was the one thing you freaking knew!"

~

A knock at the door came through, startling El out of her thoughts. She looked back in her mirror, her entire face was red and puffy, tears all over her face.

Hopper knocked again. She swallowed a few times, mustering it up inside her to say quietly, "I know. I heard him."

She didn't want her dad coming in to deliver Mike's message, she had heard it well enough from him. Hopper could tell she didn't want to talk. He was still unsure of exactly what had happened, all he knew

was his daughter had come home last night with tears streaming down her face, and refused to talk to him about it. He wanted to strangle that Wheeler kid, the chief knew it was his fault for El's state.

El sat on the edge of her bed, listening as she heard a sigh and footsteps away from her room. She let out the sigh she was holding in and curled up with her side on the bed, Mike's words still repeating in her mind like a broken record.

She sunk back into her thoughts, remembering Mike yelling how friends didn't lie. A wave of guilt rushed through her. She should have just told him to begin with, she shouldn't have kept the secret from him.

~

"I'm sorry," She had let out, "I- I should have told you."

"Instead you just waited until I found out on my own," His tone was sharp, it felt like daggers being thrown at her. He could tell he was hurting her, and El figured that was what he meant to do.

"Th- There was nothing you could do. It would only have hurt you to find out," She was pulling out all the courage inside her. Anger was now filling up her mind, she just wanted to yell and shake him into understanding her.

Mike saw her change, she wasn't a deer in the headlights, she was standing up for herself. If anything that made Mike angrier, how could she stick up for what she did?

"Nothing I could do?! El I would do anything to stop them. I would move the sea and the sky to make sure you were safe!"

In any other situation that would have sounded comforting. She knew Mike would always protect her, but right now that thought made her want to shrink down and run away.

She opened her mouth to respond, but she didn't have anything to

say to that. Tears were now racing down his cheeks as well. She just stared at him, wishing she knew what to say.

~

In that moment El heard the telephone ring, jolting her out of the memories. Part of her was glad, she didn't want to think about them anymore. But at the same time she knew exactly who was calling.

She took a few deep breaths, trying to regain composure. Shakily she picked up the phone and whispered, "Hello?"

Mike let out a sigh on the other end, "Thank god. El I lo-"

She slammed down the phone. She couldn't do this, she couldn't talk to him right now, and she definitely could hear him finish that sentence.

She stared at the hung up phone, her face contorting itself in attempt to shake off any thoughts. The war inside her mind started up again. Part of her yelled that she should just talk to him, it wasn't going to get better unless she did. But another part, the part that was winning, just sat there manipulating her to ignore it all, to shut him out.

She lied there for a while, trying to calm herself down. She wiped away the wetness all over her face and started listening to her breathing again. Breath in, breath out. Breath in, breath out.

She slapped away any thought of Mike or of last night, she wasn't going to let those thoughts in any longer.

After a while she cautiously stepped out of her bedroom. Hopper looked at his daughter, he could see the red eyes she tried to wipe away, he saw the fear and anxiety in her steps. So he sighed and asked her a question she was so thankful to hear, "Want to come to the station with me?"

El loved going to work with Hopper, Officer Callahan always told her jokes and Flo would have little pieces of candy she always gave out, but El appreciated the station that day more than ever before. With

all of the people and the rush or activity, El had a good enough distraction to get her through the day. Hopper noticed this, and El suspected this was why he brought her along.

El loved hearing all about what was happening in Hawkins, the police station was always full of the newest stories of what was going on. She listened intently to it all, blocking out any thoughts she would have if she was on her own.

But she couldn't escape it forever, that night as Hopper was getting ready to leave, Flo questioned her, "How's that Wheeler boy doing by the way?"

El's face went white, she felt the wall she had built crumbling, the dam in her eyes breaking, "He, uh, he's fine."

At that point Hopper had caught on, he gave a quick goodbye to everyone and whisked her out of the room.

She sat in the passenger seat of the police cruiser. She felt her eyes start to water. One tear, two tears started to fall. El wiped her eyes, determined not to let any more out.

Hopper watched, beating himself up inside for not knowing what to say. He was never the best at giving advice, and it broke his heart seeing his daughter cry and not be able to do anything about it.

"Did you and Mike break up?" He uttered out awkwardly, internally yelling at himself for asking.

She looked at him and he saw the wide eyes, the innocence in them, "I don't know," she answered, both lacking and full of emotion.

"Do you want to talk about it?" He put a hand on her shoulder, wanting to give some comfort.

She looked away and shook her head.

Did they break up? The very question terrified her. How she left last night really felt like a break up, but they couldn't really be over, could they? It was just a fight, El tried to reassure herself, her mind once again flashing with fears and memories.

She took a deep breath, staring out the window at all the lights of Hawkins rushing past her. She thought once again to last night, mentally preparing herself to look back. She really needed to look at what happened, she couldn't just ignore it, no matter how much that idea appealed to her.

~

Mike had just yelled back at her about how he wanted to protect her, and she just stared at him, mouth agape. She didn't know what to say. They both had tears falling down to the ground until Mike finally spoke up.

"I just wish you told me," His tone was quieter, like all the anger he previously had disappeared, but in some ways this was worse. Instead he sounded so disappointed, El felt her heart collapse.

"There's nothing you could have done to stop them."

Mike let out an exasperated groan, "How could you defend not telling me?! How could you not tell me the bad men are back? What if they took you? What if they killed you? You just wanted to keep this from me?!"

"You're right," She whispered.

Then the room went quiet, an eerie quiet that made them both want to scream. A quiet that yelled back at them that the fight wasn't over, there was just nothing left to say.

Finally Mike broke the silence open, "I just wish after all this time you finally learned to tell me things."

He wasn't angry, though he felt he should be. He felt tired, so tired of it all. All the frustration he felt back when he was 12 years old, with El never telling him anything, waiting to tell him about the Upside Down or the Demogorgon or any of the other billion things she kept from him, all that frustration was coming back.

"Don't waste your time on me then. I'm a lost cause."

She was running out of the basement. He wanted to call after her, but

he couldn't bring himself to.

~

El thought of all this. She wondered what would have happened if she hadn't run off, or if Mike had stopped her. She wondered what he looked like when she said she was leaving. She had turned around as to not see his face, she didn't think she could bear to see it. Was he upset? Was he crying? Did he even care anymore?

Her string of questions were knocked away when she felt the car stop. They were home, and sitting on the porch was a boy. It wasn't Mike though, instead sat Will, waiting for her to get home.

Her and Hopper got out of the car, and Will stood up.

“Hey El, Chief.”

Hopper nodded towards him, and went inside, leaving the two of them outside.

“Hi,” El whispered cautiously.

“Hey.”

The tension could be spotted a mile away.

“What are you doing here?” El asked, though she figured she knew the answer.

Will breathed in, “Mike feels terrible you know.”

There it was. El felt her heart clenching, she didn't want to talk about this.

“Did he send you here?”

“No, but he told me you weren't talking to him so I decided to come over.”

“Do you know what happened?”

Will shook his head, “Not really. I just know you got into a fight last

night.”

The sound of crickets filled the silence, El was trying to push herself to tell him. She kept it from Mike, she wasn't going to make the same mistake with her friends. She let out a deep breath.

“The bad men are back.”

Will's eyes widened, he didn't expect anything so terrifying, so horribly real, to be the source of the problem. He didn't know if he was ready for it.

“Ar- Are they looking for you?” He managed to stutter out.

She shook her head, “I don't know, but Mike is mad at me for not telling him.”

The silence came back, Will had no idea what to say. He came expecting to be a supportive friend through relationship drama, he wasn't prepared to give advice about someone's worst fears coming true. How do you give advice for something like that?

After a few minutes of quiet he decided to at least say what he was prepared to.

“Mike stayed home from school today. He was too upset to go in. The guys and I went to check on him after school, I'm pretty sure he stayed in bed all day. It may not mean much, but he's so sorry for what happened,” Will paused for a minute before speaking up again, “He really loves you, you know?”

El nodded her head, guilt pouring back in, “I should have told him.”

“Yeah, but he shouldn't have overreacted so much too. You should talk to him.”

El didn't respond, she just rested her head on Will's shoulder. The two just took in the sound of the crickets, and the occasional car passing. Eventually Will told her he should go home, his mom was probably getting worried. So he left, and El was alone on the porch.

Suddenly she stood up, she went inside to tell Hopper she was going

to go for a walk around the neighborhood, and then she left.

In all honesty, she didn't even think to go to Mike's house. She really just wanted a change of scenery, to go off on her own for a while. But without thinking, we always seem to end up at the place we most need to go to. That's how El found herself staring up at the big house on Maple Street, debating what to do.

This was stupid, she thought, after how she ignored him this morning he wouldn't want to see her. Will said he spent the whole day upset at home, and she knew it was all her fault.

But she couldn't stop her legs from walking over to the basement door on the side of the house. She knocked three times and held her breath. She wished desperately he was there, she couldn't bear the thought of having to face his mother or father or sister answering the front door.

But her worries disappeared when the door swung open.

"Lucas I told yo-"

Mike stopped when he realized who was really there. He looked at her hopefully, with just a hint of fear. But that hint didn't even compare to the amount of terror he felt inside.

"El."

"Mike."

She stared at him, the boy she loved, the boy who was always there for her, who always made her feel like she was home. But right now she didn't feel at home whatsoever. She felt scared and out of place and more than anything she wanted to run away, but when she looked into his eyes she couldn't bring herself to move a single step away.

"I'm so sorry El, I shouldn't ha-"

He was cut off by her pulling him into a hug, crying into his shirt. She didn't expect to react so emotionally to seeing him, but she couldn't help herself.

"I'm s-sorry," She sniffled, "I should have told you."

Mike put his arms around her and hugged as tight as he could, never wanted to let go, "No I'm sorry, I shouldn't have gotten so mad about it, I shouldn't have been such a mouthbreather to you."

El gave out a short laugh at his usage of the word, something that became a kind of inside joke to them over the years, a word she was so grateful to hear him say right now.

Mike pulled away and looked at her, "Please forgive me. I can't lose you, never again."

El looked up at him. He couldn't lose her? She found that ridiculous, if anything she couldn't lose him. He was her everything, her entire world. She didn't know life without him, and she didn't ever want to.

He could lose her, she was just the mess that after so many years couldn't even tell him things. He deserved someone so much better, someone who could talk to him, someone who didn't have bad men out there after her, someone normal.

"Why do you even bother with me anymore?" She let out.

"What?"

"I should have told you, but I still can't even do that. I'm just a burden on you. I'm sorry."

Tears were streaming down his face now, "Don't you dare say that. You just didn't want me to worry and I flipped out. You aren't a burden El, you're my home. You're the strongest person I know, and I don't know what I'd do without you."

She pulled him back into the hug, and then she admitted something she hadn't yet told anyone.

"I'm just so scared. What if they come for me?"

Mike felt his heart squeeze, "They won't. And if they do nothing's going to happen to you, I won't let it," He paused before using the next big word, but even with its power he knew he meant it, "I

promise.”

She gave a weak smile into his chest and he held onto her tighter. She felt emotional and messy, but she had him and that was what mattered.

Then he whispered one thing into her ear that made her love him all the more.

“I’ll never let you go.”

She knew he meant it. He wouldn’t let her go, not because of some fight, and not even if the bad men tried to take her away. She would always have him.

So the two stayed like that, clutching onto the other. Together, safe and sound.

Author’s Note:

I hope that came out not as terrible as I think it did, but anyway I hope you enjoyed and thanks for reading!